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CASTLEMAINE FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INC.
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Superb Fairy-wren *Malurus cyaneus*
- photo by Noel Young

Vale Ron Wescott

Many of us who live in and around Castlemaine were saddened to learn of Ron Wescott's death aged 73 on 12th March following his diagnosis with pancreatic cancer early in 2024. Ron was an active member of Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club, BirdLife Castlemaine District and U3A Castlemaine.

Ron grew up in Footscray and excelled at school in science and mathematics, going on to study civil engineering at Melbourne University, gaining a PhD in computer modelling of engineering structures. A life-long supporter of Footscray AFL team, Ron was a competitive sportsman, becoming a keen and experienced orienteer and rogaining enthusiast. Over many decades, Ron and Cheryl enjoyed ambitious cycling tours in Australia and New Zealand with a group of friends. They developed high birdwatching skills and knowledge during specialist bird tours in many parts of the country. In recent years Ron joined the Castlemaine and Bendigo Bridge clubs, becoming a skilled and competitive player while gaining yet another circle of friends.

Through rogaining, Ron came to know many of the forests around Castlemaine, becoming interested in the diverse local flora, while he and Cheryl observed the birdlife as they followed the tracks on a rogain route. So when they moved to Castlemaine in 2014, they were soon involved with birdwatching groups, bushwalking with U3A and the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club. They were also active members of the McKenzie Hill Landcare group.

During field naturalist excursions, Ron and Cheryl's birdwatching skills contributed to the lists of birds observed and Ron's interest in and developing knowledge of local flora became clear. In August 2017 the online version of "Wild Plants of Castlemaine" –C*astlemaine Flora* – was launched, and in October 2017 Ron agreed to take on the substantial task of updating this website when

The Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club acknowledges the Dja Dja Wurrung community as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the Country where we meet and study the natural environment. We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and future.

corrections and additions were needed.

In June 2019 Ron took over as Webmaster for the club's general website from Chris Timewell. With the upgrading of our website in 2022, Ron continued to play a role in keeping this website up to date. These were major contributions to our activities, involving significant time. He continued in these roles until last year.

Ron was a humble man, never one to boast of his many achievements but always ready to assist others in identifying a bird or a plant, and to help with the leadership of the activities and groups he was involved with. We will miss his knowledge and enthusiasm for nature and birding, and we extend our deepest condolences to Cheryl.

Peter Turner

Leanings and Learnings from two decades of Landcare

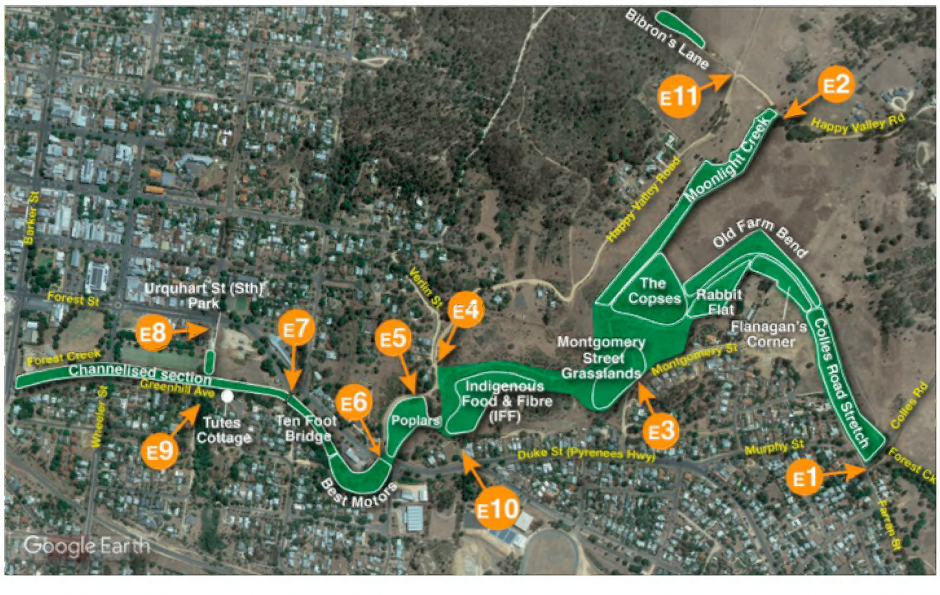
Forest Creek Restoration by Castlemaine Landcare Group

By Jenny Rolland

Following the AGM at our March meeting, we were treated to an inspiring presentation by Christine Kilmartin, President of the Castlemaine Landcare Group (CLG). Christine gave an account of the impressive work of the CLG and other agencies to restore native riparian vegetation along Forest and Moonlight Creeks. Her talk was illustrated dramatically by photos of work sites before and at different times after plantings and weeding. Christine explained that the "Leanings" were ways of working to benefit both environmental and human health, informed by the "Learnings" from the outcomes of Landcare efforts as well as acts of nature.

Forest Creek from Happy Valley Rd. *Left (EP)*: 1985, a tree-less, gorse-infested valley. *Centre (EP)*: 2009, extensive weed removal and plantings begin. *Right (EM)*: 2025, native trees and shrubs line the track, providing excellent habitat for a variety of birds.

Early aerial and on-ground photos of Happy Valley showed a gorse-infested valley, tree-less except for weedy willows in the creek, and poplars near Patterson's Bridge. The CLG was formed in 2002 and joined with CFNC members to tackle the gorse and other weeds before planting with appropriate native plants could commence. A track beside the creek had recently been established as part of the Great Dividing Trail - the Leanganook Track. Our long-time member Richard Piesse managed the building of this track on behalf of the GDT Association, and it is still well used and enjoyed by walkers and cyclists.



An aerial view of Forest Creek, Happy Valley showing CLG work sites (green) and entrances (E). *(CLG)*

Christine described the past and ongoing CLG work at different sites along Forest and Moonlight Creeks, each with their own challenges and learning experiences. Careful selection of plants is made to suit different habitats with the assistance of local native nurseries. Of particular interest is the “Indigenous Food and Fibre” (IFF) site, where plants are selected based on the Dja Dja Wurrung “Country Plan”. These include food sources such as the tubers of *Murnongs* (Yam Daisies), Chocolate Lily and Pale Vanilla Lilly, and fibrous plants such as *Lomandra* and *Dianellas*.

Planting techniques have been trialled over the years. Direct seeding proved largely unsuccessful due to a lack of top-soil, washed down-stream after the loss of vegetation during the gold mining era. Planting tube stock into deep holes has given better success rates. Watering is a big challenge. Council helped by installing a 1000L water container near the IFF site that the group fills from rain-water tanks. This is then used to fill 2L milk bottles on Landcare planting days.

The serious weed problems are being steadily tackled by the Landcare team with support by contractors. The weeds include re-emergent gorse and spiny rush as well as wild radish, hemlock, *Phalaris*, mallow and spear thistles. Grazing animals pose another problem. Rabbits are now in lower numbers due to the growth of shrubs and other ground cover plants, but deterring the hungry Eastern Grey Kangaroos is proving more difficult. Temporary fences around new planting areas are somewhat successful.

Rabbit flat. *Left (CLG)*: rabbit warrens. *Centre (CLG)*: 2019, planting day. *Right (JR)*: 2025, deep holes for planting led to a good success rate.

In the creek itself, the goals are to improve water retention and quality as well as to provide waterholes as refugia for aquatic wildlife. Waterholes formed where willows were removed, while others have been created by mechanical digging. Recently, the North Central CMA released some Southern Pygmy Perch into one of the waterholes to try and get this species re-established in the creek. A problem in these holes can be a build-up of silt, encouraging a luxuriant growth of *Phragmites* and *Typha* (bulrush). While these plants provide wonderful cover for Reed Warblers and Spotless Crakes (see Observations in this newsletter), they slow water flow, trapping more silt and preventing access to the water for other birds and insects.

Left (EP): 2009, CLG excavates a dam, about 100m NE of the footbridge. *Centre (GB)*: 2017, a beautiful aquatic habitat. *Right (JR)*: 2025, an overgrowth of *Typha* (bulrush) and *Phragmites* due to silt build-up and low water levels.

More difficult to plan for are the floods which have caused considerable damage to the track and water-course, as well as washing away recent plantings. Recent significant floods occurred in 2010, 2016 and 2022. CLG successfully lobbied council to create a higher-level track above a particularly flood-prone part of the track near “Rabbit Flat”, and council has hopefully more effectively repaired washouts along the track after the last flood in 2022.

An exciting new federal grant under the Urban Rivers and Catchments program is funding revitalisation of the “channelised” section of the creek between the heritage stone walls downstream of the little white Ten Foot bridge. Work has commenced to remove the large amount of silt and Phragmites in the creek, and the plan is to create a deeper narrower channel to increase the speed of flow, reducing sedimentation and therefore build-up of *Phragmites*. Turbulence at existing rock riffles will also prevent silting and a more natural, sinuous course will be encouraged. Some deep pools surrounded by wetland plants will be created along the channel to further support aquatic life.

Finally, Christine explained the CLG challenge to strive for a balance between riparian restoration, improved water retention and quality, as well as recreational enjoyment. Measures of environmental success come from regular bird and Water-watch surveys. Following Ern Perkins' establishment of bird survey sites along Forest Creek, Peter and Rosemary Turner as well as Euan Moore and I conduct several regular bird surveys along Forest Creek. Reflecting the evolving creation of complex riparian vegetation structures, these surveys reveal a rich diversity of bird species which use these sites. Of particular enjoyment are the spring/summer arrivals of birds such as Reed Warblers and the occasional sightings of cryptic Spotless Crakes in the reed beds. Forest Creek is now recognised as an excellent birding strip and Connecting Country have created a Bird Walk along Forest Creek with QR codes at several points, describing the habitat and likely bird species at these spots.

Regular Water-watch surveys are conducted by Matt Kennedy and helpers, measuring water quality. Water-bug days prove particularly popular with children as well as adults, amazed at the range of invertebrates that live in the creek. There is also evidence of Rakali in the creek and a healthy frog population after rain. It is highly likely that Long-necked Turtles and even Platypus use Forest Creek.

As a special reward for the work of the CLG, Christine recently met a young lad sitting quietly under the Ten Foot Bridge enjoying the creek-side wildlife and "photographing anything that came his way!"

Water-bug survey at the "Best Motors" site. *(CLG)*

Photo credits: EP – Ern Perkins, CFNC Photo-point project; EM – Euan Moore; JR – Jenny Rolland; GB – George Broadway; CLG – Castlemaine Landcare Group

Our March excursion to view the Landcare work first-hand unfortunately had to be postponed due to high temperatures, but it is rescheduled for our next, April excursion. Please add your photos of flora and fauna along Forest Creek on this day and anytime to the iNaturalist project for the CLG area that Euan has set up to record the amazing diversity of flora and fauna that is emerging as the Landcare work matures. For further information about the CLG: Castlemaine Landcare Group – Revegetation for OUR future

Christine delivering an excellent presentation to the club. Photo: Lou Citroen

Thank you Rita Mills!

With Rita's recent move into Penhall, she has kindly donated a large amount of early club papers to us, giving a valuable historical perspective. Rita is a founding member of our club.

Cathrine Harboe-Ree and I visited Rita recently to thank her for the papers, and to also thank her for all the work she has done for the club. Among other things, Rita was President for several years and a long-time newsletter editor. Of special note, Rita painted our beautiful logo (see back page). We were able to give her some examples of how her logo is being used – on our recent 3rd edition of the "Indigenous Plants of Castlemaine and Surrounds" glossy brochure, on our General Brochure and on our name tags. *Thank you Rita!*

Jenny Rolland

Cathrine and Rita

Rita with brochures using her artwork for our logo

From the Committee

At our AGM on 14 March existing Committee members were elected unopposed, with the welcome addition of a new member, Kerrie Jennings, and there were no changes to the office bearers. In presenting the Annual Report, President Euan Moore thanked Committee members and volunteers who contribute in so many ways to the Club's activities. Treasurer Geoff Harris presented the Financial Report showing a healthy financial position, which has meant another year with no increase in fees.

The Committee has been actively responding to various matters relevant to our interests. We have contributed to the strategic development of Coliban Water's upgrade of the Castlemaine Water Treatment Plant, supporting the proposed water flow that will ensure sufficient water to support platypus and other aquatic creatures, and we are pleased to see that the proposed bird hide is going ahead. We have also drawn to the attention of Forest Fire Management Victoria a number of concerns about their proposed burns, particularly the possible or probable loss of threatened plant species and the likely rapid spread of Phytophthora. Finally, we have made a submission to the Mount Alexander Shire Council in response to its proposed nature strip guidelines, encouraging a more generous approach to building natural environments in our nature strips.

We look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at meetings and other activities in autumn, which is a lovely time of the year in this district.

Cathrine Harboe – Ree, Secretary

March Observations

Yes, it's a Koala in the Walmer State Forest!

Photo by Geoff Harris

Spotless Crake, *Zapornia tabuensis,* photographed along Forest Creek, upstream from the footbridge on Leanganook Tk in early March. The second time in 5 years that I have recorded this species in the area. This is a cryptic and timid species that spends most of the time foraging in tall reeds and other plants at the waters edge, only occasionally coming out into the open in the early morning.

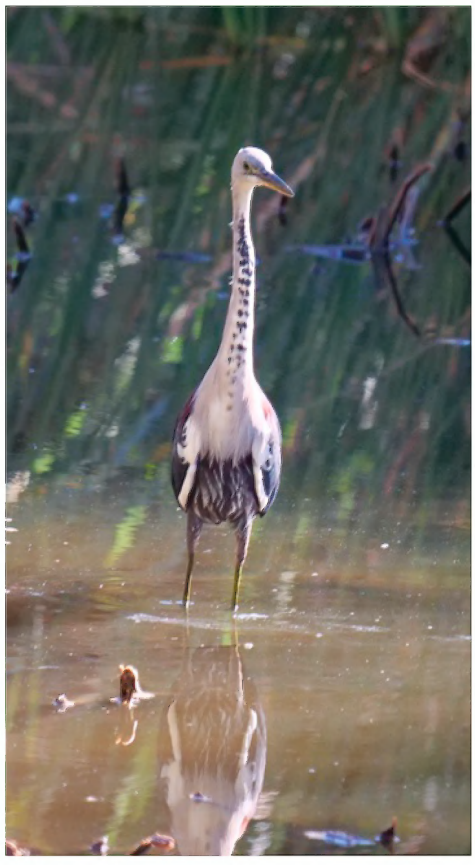
Photo by Euan Moore

The Noble Herons

Apart from the Nankeen Night Heron, there are two Heron species often seen in our region. The smaller White-faced Heron is more common, and often breeds on the island in lake Joanna, CBG. Outside of the breeding season both species are usually solitary, hunting in the shallow water of dams or water-holes in drying creek beds. They are usually quite wary, but sometimes choose to ignore human presence as did the White-necked Heron foraging in the pool north of the footbridge on the Happy Valley track recently. The spots on its neck suggest a young bird, which might be a reason for its tolerance as I sat on the bridge a few metres away. Herons are attractive and noble birds in close quarters, and it is fascinating to watch their stealthy hunting techniques.

White-necked Heron
Forest Creek

Photos by Noel Young



White-faced Heron at Expedition Pass Res. Photos by Noel Young

Coming Events in April

Monthly General Meeting, Friday 11th April, 7.30pm

Uniting Church Fellowship Room, Lyttleton St.

Speaker: Steve Williams, "Mysteries of the Life Cycles of Moths"

Steve calls himself a "mothylated spirit", meaning he studies moths. He records moths on a light sheet every night at home and rears moths from their eggs. These activities help him answer questions like: What is there? What and where is it feeding? What and where is it at each stage in its life cycle? What is the length of life cycles and how many generations might occur annually? How is it being affected by climate and other events? Steve will also discuss how his information is clarifying the interplay and interconnection between plants, insects and animals higher in the food chain.

Steve's presentation will be supported by photographs from the local area of some particularly beautiful and interesting creatures. He will also set up a moth sheet outside the hall during the evening to check out what moth and other insect species are in the area.

Observations: Members and visitors are invited to share their recent interesting observations at the meeting. Please email any photos as uncropped JPEG file(s) and supporting notes to Jill Williams (jilliwill33@gmail.com) by noon on the day of the meeting.

Excursion, Saturday 12th April, 1.30pm

"Forest Creek Restoration by Castlemaine Landcare Group"
Leader: Christine Kilmartin

This excursion is rescheduled from March due to the high temperature. Christine will take us for a walk along the Great Dividing Trail path beside Forest Creek (now named Leanganook Track) to see first-hand the remarkable transformation of a gorse-infested and tree-less valley to a productive native riparian strip following over 20 years of work by CLG and supporting agencies. She will also point out sites of ongoing projects such as the "Indigenous Food and Fibre" plot. As we walk, we will also be noting the birds, insects and other wildlife enjoying the restored habitats.

Meet: for car-pooling and **1.30pm** departure at the northern end of the Car Park north of the Railway Goods Shed, Kennedy St. Castlemaine. We will start and end the walk at the grasslands at 7 Montgomery Street.

Bring: water, snacks, **clean** sturdy shoes, binoculars (if you have some), chairs, afternoon tea.

All Welcome

White-browed Babbler at the Muckleford Golf Course
Photo by Noel Young

Program

Meetings: 7.30pm, 2nd Friday of the month except for January.
Venue: Uniting Church Hall (UCH), Lyttleton Street, Castlemaine except during winter (June-August) when they are held by Zoom.

Excursions are held on the Saturday following the monthly meeting and leave from the northern end of the car park north of the Railway Goods Shed, Kennedy St. at 1.30pm unless stated otherwise.

See "Coming Events" page for more details about April events.

Fri 11th April, 7.30pm
Meeting (UCH) "**Mysteries of the Life Cycles of Moths"**
Speaker: Steve Williams

Sat 12th April, 1.30pm
Excursion: "**Forest Creek Restoration by Castlemaine Landcare Group"**.
Leader: Christine Kilmartin (President, Castlemaine Landcare Group)

Fri 9th May, 7.30pm
Meeting (UCH) "Talking Turtles"
Speaker: Graham Stockfeld (President, Turtles Australia**)**

Sat 10th May, 1.30pm
Excursion: Photographing flowers, grasses and insects for effective iNaturalist identification. Red, White and Blue mine.
Leader: Jill Williams

Fri 12th June, 7.30pm
Meeting (UCH) "How light pollution impacts wildlife"
Speaker: Kelly Clitheroe (President, Dark Skies International Assoc. Vic.)

Fri 12th-Sun 14th September, Wedderburn weekend – book your accommodation early; see our March newsletter for more details.

See our website calendar of events for further dates and activities: Calendar of Events – Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club

Visitors are welcome at club activities

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

#A0003010B

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Membership

Includes the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist.
(Membership forms on CFNC website)

Single $35, Family $50
Pensioner or student:
Single $25, Family $30

Newsletter: Castlemaine Naturalist

Email items: newsletter.cfnc@gmail.com

May edition deadline: **25th April**

Committee

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Secretary: Cathrine Harboe-Ree

Treasurer: Geoff Harris

Committee:

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Jenny Rolland	Noel Young
Peter Turner	Kerrie Jennings

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Program Coordinator:
Jenny Rolland

Newsletter Distributor:
Geraldine Harris

The Nodding Greenhood *Pterostylis nutans* is the emblem of the club. Design by Rita Mills.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club.